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THE DEVELOPMENT OF HINDU NATIONALISM (HINDUTVA) IN INDIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

India has one of the most heterogeneous societies in the world. It is a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Constitutionally, it is also a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic. But in recent times, Hindu nationalism or Hindutva has been dominant in shaping Indian politics. Hindutva, a shorthand of Hindu nationalism, is actually a politico-ideological device that appears to be disassociated from the spiritual roots of Hinduism and, to many, it is very much alike to the rise of political Islam. Although Hinduism is native to the Indian subcontinent, Hindutva as a political ideology is comparatively a recent phenomenon which creates a growing concern to the land since 1920s. India experienced the rise of Hindutva as a concrete political ideology in 1923 introduced by V. D. Savarkar as it starts to achieve its popularity since 1980s.

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Obviously it has many reasons. Hindutva is not a monolithic concept as it is generally perceived. Rather, its text, subtext and context had changed throughout the 20th century depending on the period and leadership. This article aims to analyze the trend of the development of Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva in India since its start in the 20th century through a historical lens.

Introduction

India is a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Moreover, it has the largest democracy in the world. In 1947, Pakistan came into being as a theocratic country for the subcontinent's Muslim population but India was born as a secular, democratic country. Constitutionally, India is now a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic, while Pakistan is an Islamic republic. India is a composite nation and pluralistic by its nature as its population is a mix of different ethnic groups, languages and traditions. Historically, the Indian subcontinent was never a unified kingdom or nation before independence but it was a conglomeration of different large and small states. Although India is a multicultural, secular, democratic country, in recent times, there has been a shift towards Hindu nationalism or Hindutva ideology and it has become a familiar feature in modern Indian politics. Hinduism is native to Indian subcontinent but Hindutva, nowadays, as a political ideology, is being manifested in Indian society which is usually referred to as Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism, as an ideology, was constructed between the 1870s and 1920s; however, it crystallized as a doctrine in the early 1920s. This article intends to focus on the historical development of Hindu nationalism (Hindutva) in the 20th century in India, especially from 1920s onward.

Research Methodology

It is a qualitative research where both primary and secondary sources have been used. Besides primary sources, this article has been mainly prepared with the assistance of secondary sources including books, international journals, newspapers, articles of different international

organizations, write-up of well established digital forum and reliable internet sources. For primary sources, writings of V. D. Savarkar, M. S. Golwalkar and *The Organiser* (Publication of Hindutva organization RSS) have been used extensively. In this article, essentially the historical method has been followed. This research work has the following objectives and research questions:

- a. How did Hindutva emerge as a concrete political ideology in the first half of the twentieth century?;
- b. How does Hindutva plod through an ideological paradigm shifting after the partition of India and subsequent assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948?;
3. What factors led to the popularity of Hindutva in 1980s that enables Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coming to the power at the national level in 1990s with the partial decadence of Indian National Congress (INC) as a secular political party?

Background

The rise of Hindu nationalism in India is not a recent phenomenon. The intellectual journey of Hindu nationalism began in the 19th century during the struggle for national independence of Indian people against British rule (Eviane, 2020, p. 221). In other words, the expression of first Hindu mobilization came to the forefront in the 19th century as an ideological reaction to British domination and gave to birth what was known as ‘neo-Hinduism’ (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 7). The ideological roots of Hindu nationalism lie in religious and revivalist movements that emerged among the educated Hindus in the 19th century. But Hindu nationalism took concrete shape in the 1920s. Because, at that time, India saw the emergence of Hindu nationalism as a form of political mobilization. In 1906, a Muslim political party, all India Muslim League was formed. Furthermore, The British government set up a separate electorates system in 1909 in which Hindu and Muslim communities could vote for Hindu and Muslim candidates respectively in local elections (Eviane, 2020, p. 221). So, the Partition of Bengal in 1905, the subsequent formation of

Muslim League and setting up of separate electorates in 1909 based on religious criteria were the first steps in transforming the religious divide into a political one. This divide-and-rule policy initiated by the British colonial authority created a polarized environment in which religiously framed identity politics flourished. Local Hindu elites started to establish Hindu *Sabhas* (associations) that reached its culmination in 1915 through the formation of All India Hindu Sabha or Hindu Mahasabha which ultimately inspired anti-Muslim and anti-British sentiment (Ibid., p. 221).

The year 1919 was the turning point for the development of Hindu nationalism in British India. In this year, Rowlatt Acts, Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms and the Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre –all contributed towards a perfect environment for Indian dissatisfaction. In addition, a number of eminent Muslims launched a movement called ‘Khilafat Movement’ against the British in 1919. Many *Ulemas* stimulated and sustained this mobilization in their community which turned in some instances into anti-Hindu riots. In 1921, partly as a result of Khilafat agitations a peasant revolt, in south-western Malabar (now in Kerala) was superseded by a violent uprising by sections of the Muslim peasant Mapilla (‘Moplah’) community. The Moplah sought to create their own Khilafat and forced the conversion of some Hindus to Islam (Bhatt, 2001, p. 47). The state reacted harshly to the Moplah uprising resulted in brutal confrontation on both sides. Although Khilafat movement and Moplah uprising faded away, it ignited many right-leaning self-proclaimed defenders of Hinduism. Many Hindus started to look at this Moplah challenge and Khilafat movement through religious lens by presuming Muslims as a threat which could only be tackled militantly (Bhagavan, 2008, p. 40). The wave of riots that spread over India in early 1920s expedited a Hindu reaction which resulted in reintroducing of the Hindu Mahasabha in April 1921 at Haridwar by its new name as Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha (The Indian Express, February 2, 2019). It brought together people who were against secular outlook of major political parties like Indian National Congress led by Mahatma Gandhi and others. Mahasabha’s ideology supported the

education and upgradation of Hindus and conversion of Muslims to Hinduism (Ganguly, The Conversation, May 27, 2019).

Rise of Hindutva since 1920s as a Political Ideology

Hindutva – literally ‘Hinduness’ – is predominant form or shorthand for Hindu nationalism and was first articulated, popularized and defined by V. D. Savarkar (1883-1966) in 1923. Nineteenth century Hindu reformers like Dayananda, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo were men of religion who wished to restate Hinduism, reform Hindu society and set up Hinduism in a national context. Conversely, V. D. Savarkar had little to do with the matters of faith but unlike anyone before him he politicized religion and introduced religious metaphors into politics (Sharma, 2015, p.147). Before embarking on further discussion on Hindutva we first need to understand what Hinduism is. Hinduism is the amalgamation of diverse or plural tradition and its roots can be traced back to before 3000 BCE where Aryans, Dravidians and tribal cultures all have mixed up. It is better being understood as a traditional way of life, culture and code of behavior. It was not started as religion but as a traditional way of life which with the passage of time transformed into religion. In that sense, it is the oldest religion but not organized one as it has no single founder, no single scripture to follow, no firm belief system and no authoritative organization like church. Believers of Hinduism consider the idea of India as territorial and also believe anybody born and live within that territory is Indian. So, they believe the concept of Indian citizenship from the territorial ground. Although holy lands of some of the religions in India lie outside India, but they are citizen as they born within the territory. Believers of Hinduism usually are liberal and secular (Sharma, 2020, pp. 43-44). On the other hand, believers of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism or political Hinduism consider Hindu as the original inhabitants of this land where flourished a great civilization in the past. They think Muslims and Christians are hostile to Hinduism because they came from outside to rule India. As such, Hindutva is seeking to build one state called India, one religion called Hinduism, one language

named Hindi and one nation believing in Hinduism (Ibid., p. 44).

However, Savarkar propounded an extreme form of Hindu nationalism in Indian political discourse and his only ideal was to establish India as a Hindu nation (Sharma, 2015, p. 147). He underlined Hindutva as a cultural, religious and racial entity, in which Hinduism as a religion formed not as a whole but as a part (Graham, 1990, p. 45). Therefore, Hindutva is a politico-ideological device which is mainly disassociated from the spiritual roots of Hinduism and very much alike political Islam. Savarkar first published *Essentials of Hindutva* in 1923 and republished it as *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* in 1928 which is still considered as the foundational text of Hindu nationalist creed (Tharoor, 2018). At the onset, Savarkar made it very precise that Hindutva was not the same as Hinduism as it had nothing to do with religion or rituals (The Telegraph, August 22, 2019). So, Hindutva is synonymous with English 'Hinduness' but not to be equated with Hinduism. In his book (*Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?*) he clearly addresses two core issues: (1) who is Hindu, and (2) what is Hindutva. He defines a Hindu as one who envisages India to be his motherland (*matrbhumi*), the land of his forefathers (*pitrbhumi*), and his holy land (*punya bhumi*) (Tharoor, 2018). These then constitute the three essentials of Hindutva. The three essentials of Hindutva, according to Savarkar definition, were nation (*rashtra*), common race (*jati*) and common culture or civilization (*sanskriti*) (Ibid.). Hindutva, therefore, is an idea that denotes a political community united by a shared culture based on Sanskritic languages and 'common laws and rites', geographical origin and racial connection (Harriss, John, Craig Jeffrey and Stuart, Corbridge, 2017, p.8). Savarkar writes in his book:

'A Hindu then is he who feels attachment to the land ...of his forefathers-as his Fatherland; who inherits the blood of the great race whose first and discernable source could be traced from the Himalayan altitudes... and who... has inherited and claims as his own the Hindu Sanskriti, the Hindu civilization...(Savarkar, 1969, p. 100)'

So, to put it bluntly, Hindutva actually lies on three main pillars: racial features, common culture and geographical unity (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 86). According to Hindutva introduced by Savarkar, Hindu nationality would be applicable only for 'Indian religions' not 'religions practiced in India' (Sharma, 2002, p. 23). Savarkar clearly stated that his definition only included people of "Indian religions", namely Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism and excluded Muslims and Christians because he considered them intruders since their 'holy lands' lay outside India and they show extraterritorial loyalties. Hindus constitute about 80% of India's total population and Muslims 15%. Hindu nationalism as a political idea believes that Hindu faith and culture should shape the state and its policies. Because Savarkar composed *Hindutva* in response to the pan-Islamic mobilization of the Khilafat movement, most of his contemplations stemmed from his profound hostility toward Islam and its adherents (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.15).

However, Savarkar handed Hindu nationalism with an ideology but he did not layout a plan of action through which Hindus could counter Muslim threat or reform and organize themselves (Ibid., p.16). This task was later adopted by another Maharashtrian, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889–1940) who established Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (henceforth RSS) in 1925 at Nagpur after being highly influenced by Savakar's book. This organization quickly developed into the largest Hindu nationalist movement and intention of this organization was to spread out Hindutva ideology and also to infuse new physical strength into the majority Hindu community (Ibid., p.16). RSS was a cohesive and motivated body of Hindu young men. The mission of RSS established by Hedgewar was to create a Hindu state and since its inception it started to promulgate a militant form of Hindu nationalism as the prime basis for national identity of India (Narula, 2003, pp. 42-43). RSS under Hedgewar carefully kept itself aloof from the Indian freedom movement and anti-British political activities. Although Hedgewar personally took part in Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Indian National Congress (henceforth INC) in 1930

but he did not get the RSS involved in the movement. Actually, RSS did not play an active role in Indian freedom movement as it had several ideological disagreements with INC. Hedgewar (RSS Chief: 1925-1940) and his successor M. S. Golwalkar (RSS Chief: 1940-1973) both staunchly opposed to the united freedom movement, mainly led by INC, as its prime goal was all-inclusive India. Furthermore, Golwalkar denounced the freedom struggle as ‘territorial nationalism’. In fact, territorial nationalism denotes the modern variant of nationalism that identifies a state with its territory and believes in equal rights of citizenship of all those who live within its territory (Tharoor, *The Print*, January 27, 2018). But standing against the territorial nationalism, Golwalkar writes:

‘The theories of territorial nationalism and of common danger, which formed the basis of our concept of nation, had deprived us of the positive and inspiring content of our real Hindu Nationhood and made many of the ‘freedom movements’ virtually anti-British movements (Golwalkar, 1968, pp.142-43).’

Golwalkar and RSS both were passionate supporter of ‘cultural nationalism’. Golwalkar’s *Bunch of Thoughts* argues that:

‘Our concept of Hindu Nation is not a mere bundle of political and economic rights. It is essentially cultural one. Our ancient and sublime cultural values of life form its life-breath (Ibid., p. 22).’

Golwalkar also reminded the RSS that fighting British was not a part of their agenda. In this context, Golwalkar is reported to have said:

‘We should remember that our pledge we have talked of freedom of the country through defending religion and culture, there is no mention of departure of British from here.’ (Shri Guruji Samagra Darshan, Vol. IV, n.d., p. 2)

So, while Indian freedom movement was centered on ending

British rule, the RSS believed that restoring Hinduism should be cornerstone of the movement (Narula, 2003, p. 43).

Hedgewar died in 1940 and another prominent ideologue of Hindutva, as mentioned earlier, M. S. Golwalkar became the head (*sarsanghchhalak*) of the RSS in the same year. RSS gained impetus only with the arrival of Golwalkar on the scene. Being a capable organizer, he was instrumental in spreading the Hindu nationalist influence by breaking societal and regional barriers. He further strengthened the isolation of RSS from Indian freedom movement. He forbade RSS to take part in Quit India Movement (1942). He emphasized defending religion and culture to achieve freedom rather than fighting the British. Golwalkar strongly opposed the idea of a secular state. The essence of RSS philosophy codified by Golwalkar is worth mentioning:

‘The non-Hindu people of Hindustan must either adopt Hindu culture and languages, must learn and respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but of those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture . . . in a word they must cease to be foreigners; or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment-not even citizens’ rights (Golwalkar, 1939, p.105).’

Being a strong ideologue of Hindutva, Golwalkar codified his idea in his book *We or Nationhood Defined* (1939). Savarkar did not define Hindutva as a religion or claimed that the term should correspond to Hinduism. Hindutva would rather be a collective cultural force whose opinion was that the populace is under the similar identity parole (Lindahl, 2018, p. 4). Founders of RSS were very inspired by the ideas of nationalism of Hitler as Golwalkar based much of his teaching on the race theories of Nazi Germany. Golwalkar Writes:

‘German race pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic Races-the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by (Golwalkar, 1939, p. 87).’

RSS did not accept the idea of Indian nationalism led by Mahatma Gandhi, rather RSS had the goal of Hindu nation and ideology of Hindutva (Puniyani, n.d., AsiaNews). Indeed, Savarkar and Golwalkar formed the bedrock of the ideology of Hindu nationalism.

Post-independence Hindutva

Partition of India in 1947 was one of the most calamitous events in the human history. Estimates vary but most say and it is now widely accepted that partition displaced about 15 million people and killed nearly a million people. This partition along the religious lines also reignited the fire of Hindu nationalism. The Partition of the Indian subcontinent persuaded the extremist Hindu nationalists that since Pakistan was a Muslim nation, India ought to be a Hindu nation (Josh, 2018, p.176). As a result, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi accusing him of consistently pandering to the Muslims in 1948 by Nathuram Godse resulted in a ban on the organization (RSS) which was imposed in February 1948 and arrest of 20,000 volunteers (*swayamsevaks*). On a related note, Nathuram Godse was a former RSS member and an acolyte of Savarkar. The people who had gone underground at that time found that no major political power was ready to support the cause of the RSS in parliament or elsewhere (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.175). In fact, Hindutva was at bay during the first decades of Indian independence due to several reasons. Firstly, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in the hand of a Hindu nationalist and the idea of a composite nation and plural

polity inspired by the freedom movement were prime causes behind this. Also, the towering personality of Jawaharlal Nehru with his strong commitment towards secular ideal also helped to subdue Hindutva during the first decades after partition. However, after the ban was lifted in July 1949, RSS decided that it could no longer remain disengaged from electoral politics. Therefore, RSS leaders felt the need to set up a political wing. Among them K. R. Malkani (1921-2003) was prominent who was born in a Congress family but joined the RSS in 1941. In December 1949, he wrote in the RSS mouth piece *The Organiser*:

‘Sangh must take part in politics not only to protect itself against the greedy design of politicians, but to stop the Bharatiya and anti-Bharatiya policies of the Government and to advance and expedite the cause of Bharatiya through state machinery side by side with official effort in the same direction . . . Sangh must continue as it is, an “ashram” for the national cultural education of the entire citizenry, but it must develop a political wing for the more effective and early achievement of its ideals (The Organiser, December 1, 1949, pp.7-14).’

Golwalkar approved the views of Malkani and others regarding the formation of a new political party in 1950, which a year later took the form of Bharatiya Jana Sangh. Thenceforth, Hindu nationalism has developed alongside street mobilizations and explicit political projects (Alder, Quartz India, March 3, 2016). This time RSS leaders co-opted Shyama Prasad Mookerjee who had been a renowned figure of the Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal to set up the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (henceforth BJS) on October 21, 1951. At the inception of BJS, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and RSS members like Deendayal Upadhyaya were at its helm. But after the untimely death of Mookerjee in 1953, Upadhyaya took over the party organization and eliminated Hindu Mahasabhaites. However, this time BJS gradually raised identity related issues and resorted to war mongering with aggressive attitudes towards neighbors (mainly

Pakistan and China) by demanding Muslims should be Indianized (Puniyani, n.d., AsiaNews). BJS was formed in the backdrop of growing concern regarding the Nehruvian paradigm of secular politics as many believed it was too westernized and too soft on neighbors like Pakistan and China, ignoring national interests. Hence, its leadership strongly advocated hard policy against Pakistan and China and obviously – due to ideological differences – uninterested in political communism in India and as such USSR (Bharatiya Jana Sangh, n.d. *Fandom*). Notably, much before the Chinese aggression on India in 1962, BJS and RSS leaders were concerned about the expansionist tendencies of communist China. In the 1950s when China annexed Tibet and Indian government recognized the annexed Tibet as a part of China, BJS – an opposition party at that time – called for the withdrawal of India’s recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet and re-recognition of Tibet’s independence (Krzysztof, *The Diplomat*, February 9, 2021). However, many BJS leaders also initiated the drive to ban cow slaughter nationwide in the early 1960s (*The Hindu*, November, 8, 2016). Upadhyaya was not only a full time organizer of RSS but also was a man of ideologue of Hindutva. Upadhyaya was intensely inspired by the Hindutva ideology of Savarkar. He also developed a set of concepts under the name of ‘Integral Humanism’ which was adopted as official doctrine by BJS in 1965 (Hansen, 1998, p. 46). In short, Integral Humanism was an effort to redefine Hindutva by blending some of the Gandhian ideas e.g., *swadeshi* (domestic), *Gram Swaraj* (village self rule) and *sarvodaya* (progress for all) into Hindu nationalist politics (Chakrabarty, 2008, p. 46).

However, RSS continued to play crucial role in BJS from 1950s onward and simultaneously it also started to pay attention on non-electoral organizations with intention to unify Hindus. RSS also started to inculcate values in them it thought essential to strengthen the Hindu nation (Swamy, 2003, p. 7). The BJS was only one of the front organizations set up by the RSS, but RSS had also widespread intention to establish organizations working within specific social categories (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 18). Hence,

RSS was silently infiltrating in all the wings of state, society, education, media, judiciary, police and army. It was working to oppose the liberal values, which were considered progressive, by promoting religiosity and conservatism in cultural arena (Puniyani, n.d., AsiaNews). Thus, RSS cadres centered in Delhi established a student union called *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (ABVP) in 1948 which was aimed at combating the communist influence on university campuses. In 1955, RSS formed *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh* (BMS) whose primary mission was to counter communist red unions in the name of Hindu nationalist ideology. In addition, RSS formed a more targeted organization like *Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram* (VKA) in 1952 in order to counter Christian movements among the aboriginals of India and to stop conversion (Jaffrelot, 2007, p. 18).

RSS has now over 15 formal affiliates (Roy, *THE INDIAN FORUM*, August 17, 2021). Most importantly, RSS set up *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (henceforth VHP) in 1964 to cover the social aspects of the RSS activities. VHP is still actively involved in Sanskrit education, the organization of Hindu rituals and rites, and converting other religious people like Muslims, Christians and tribals (primarily believe in animism) to Hinduism (Narula, 2003, p. 45). *Bharat Sanskrit Parishad* was founded in 1987 by VHP to promote Sanskrit education as VHP believes that Sanskrit language is the depository of the Indian spiritual heritage. VHP is actually an aggressive and an activist wing of RSS to promote Hindutva. It was formed with the explicit purpose of promoting Hinduism in India and the World. One of the main tasks of VHP is to defend traditional Hinduism but by creating a new Hindu identity (Lochtefeld, 1994, pp. 599-600). As Hinduism is not a codified belief system due to its loose combination of different beliefs and practices, VHP wanted to create a codified Hinduism what Romila Thapar calls 'Syndicated Hinduism' (Shah, 2004, p.62). However, the VHP also organizes and disseminates the RSS message to Hindus living outside India and holds conferences for Hindu religious leaders from across the country. For instance, the first World Hindu Conference was held by the VHP to integrate all Hindus, by birth or conviction, at Bombay in August 1964 and

VHP also organized second World Hindu Conference with a same motto of unifying and integrating Hindu society at Allahabad on January 25-27, 1979 (Katju, 1998, pp. 34-52). Another subsidiary, *Vidya Bharati* was established in 1977 with objective of organizing the RSS activities in education and in 1979 the RSS founded *Seva Bharati* to penetrate India's slums through social activities. All of these formed 'Sangh Parivar', or 'the family of the Sangh'. In 1960s, another Hindu nationalist party called *Shiv Sena* emerged in Indian political arena. Although it was not associated with RSS, both emerged in the same region— Maharashtra. In the late 1980s *Shiv Sena* turned to a militantly anti-Muslim position and has been allied to the Bharatiya Janata Party since, which will be discussed in due course.

However, BJS, as a political organization, always supported the rebuilding of India in congruence with Hindu culture and craved for the formation of a strong unified state. But BJS remained a marginal force before getting chance to become part of Janata Party in 1977. Nevertheless, due to the organizational skill of Deendayal Upadhyaya BJS grew and spread. In 1952, the BJS won only 3 seats what rose to 14 in 1962 and 25 in 1967 elections (Battaglia, 2017, p.9). An affiliate of Sangh, BJS was founded to counter the centre-left secularist INC. BJS always rejected the Gandhian notion of pluralism and diversity instead it advocated ethnic nationalism or ethnonationalism. In fact, ethnonationalism, rooted in Hindutva, distinct from secular nationalism as it draws attention to Hindu identity rather than Indian. The BJS campaigned on a xenophobic platform – a sense which perceives religious minorities like Muslims and Christians in India as internal enemies and this is a direct by-product of the insecurities of majority population in respective religions – from the late 1960s, calling for minorities to 'Indianize' and assimilates into a so-called 'Hindian' nation (Eviane, 2020, p. 226). BJS advocated strong defense policy, imposition of Hindi as national language, anti-imperialism, protection of the cow and other Hindu symbols. It worked for one country, one nation, one culture and one law (Datta, 1999, p. 580). However, during the

state of Emergency (1975-1977) declared by Indira Gandhi, RSS was banned and many opposition leaders of BJS were also thrown into jail. Hindu nationalist movement was also under attack at that time. Consequently, the Sangh was forced to go underground and the BJS became part of the Janata Party, the opposition coalition. In 1977, BJS merged with several other right, centre and left parties like Bharatiya Lok Dal, the Congress (O) and the Socialist Party to form the Janata Party. Janata Party was an amalgamation of several opposition parties that had not united on the basis of any common ideology but by a shared distaste to the INC and imposed Emergency (1975-1977) by Indira Gandhi. In fact, in 1970s BJS changed its strategy and it started to follow a moderate line by merging with opposition coalition – Janata Party in 1977. In 1977 election BJS won 9 seats in the parliament. But coalition Janata Party split twice, in 1978 and 1980. In 1980, BJS faction broke away from Janata Party over the issue of dual membership as Janata Coalition wanted to prohibit BJS officials from participation in the RSS and reorganized itself as Bharatiya Janata Party (henceforth BJP). This time, BJS morphed into the BJP under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee and it remained faithful to moderate strategy. But the more moderate approach followed by the BJP actually resented RSS and Sangh Parivar. At this point, BJP under Vajpayee started to emphasize Gandhian socialism and Upadhyaya doctrine of Integral Humanism rather than the communal issues. But BJP was neither socialist nor Gandhian rather this policy was adopted for electoral purposes – to gain more public support (Swamy, 2003, p. 7).

Atal Bihari Vajpayee – the first president of BJP – diluted the original Hindutva ideology of BJS to become more acceptable in Indian party politics by assuming more moderate approach which as mentioned ultimately resented Sangh Parivar (Jaffrelot, 2007, p.20). Indeed, Hindu nationalism's political return was also a by-product of the erosion of secular nationalism. During the time of Emergency (1975-77) declared by Indira Gandhi, RSS and other Hindu nationalist groups rose as main players in the opposition and also weakened Gandhi's ruling INC by creating a space of

contestation (Doshi, n.d. p.120). After the electoral victory of 1980, Indira Gandhi turned to Hinduism in her personal and political life, and INC became a primary vehicle to mobilize and exploit Hindu nationalism. Compromising with Hindu nationalism by INC paved the way to gain RSS support for Rajiv Gandhi in the 1984 elections (Yogendra and Dhirendra, 1989, p. 320). Furthermore, when BJP under the leadership of Vajpayee declared its goal to follow 'Gandhian Socialism', RSS openly expressed its displeasure with the BJP by calling it as a core ideological deviation. But Vajpayee's decision to follow a moderate approach was most likely based on a strategic calculation. Vajpayee, in fact, intended to retain supporters of the erstwhile JP that had joined the BJP (Rahul, 2019, p. 28). Leading RSS figures openly called upon the RSS cadres to support INC, rather than the BJP in 1984 (Hansen, 1998, p.158). As a result, RSS lent support to Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 elections and BJP got only 2 seats because it contested parliamentary election on the basis of Gandhian socialism. This ensured the landslide victory of Rajiv Gandhi. From that moment on, BJP without question clearly has been attached to the Hindu nationalist movement leaving moderate political clout (Battaglia, 2017, p. 9). Also, BJP started to liberally apply the views of early Hindu nationalist ideologues like Savarkar and Hegdewar to create a sense of nationhood among the Hindu majority without noticing minority interests from 1984 onward (Mishra, 2000, p.12). BJP started to pursue soft-Hindutva for political gain by appealing to the masses.

Since 1980s INC began to lose its ground in Indian politics as its concepts of secularism and nationalism started to fade away gradually while Hindu nationalism seized its opportunity to rise again (Shida, *CIR*, p. 59). In 1980s, RSS made greater use of the VHP to rekindle ethno-religious political activism. It found its expression through Ayodhya movement in mid-1980s. Ayodhya is a town of Uttar Pradesh is generally believed the birthplace of Lord Rama in Hindu tradition. The Babri Masjid was a mosque built in 1528 by Mughal emperor Babur in Ayodha. Many Hindus believed that the mosque was built at the birthplace on the site where

according to tradition Rama was born. In 1984, the VHP called this site to be returned to the Hindus. In 1989, with all logistical support of the RSS, the VHP organized Ram Shila Pujan festivals which involved a nationwide procession of consecrated bricks collected from all over the country for the construction of large Ram temple in Ayodha (Hansen, 1998, p. 160). BJP seized this opportunity to build its popularity. Actually, BJP took a turn toward a clear-cut communal strategy after L. K. Advani's election as party president in 1986 (Ibid., p. 158). BJP, therefore, took the Ayodha or Ram Janmabhoomi (literally, 'Rama's Birthplace') issue as an official ideological inventory from July 1989. BJP leader L. K. Advani galvanized support for its ideology in north India by leading the Ram Janmabhoomi agitation with *rath yatra* (Chariot journey) in 1990 through large parts of the country. It created a strong support base for the party, at least, in some parts of India in which so-called Hindu sentiments were well established. Ayodha issue was the main focus of BJP and it worked well as it secured 86 seats in Lok Sabha polls of 1989 (Ibid., p. 160). From mid-1980s BJP and RSS started to pursue Hindutva and ethno-religious political activism. In 1980s, there created a congenial environment due to some happenings in India which helped BJP and RSS to gain ground among Indian masses. Following paragraphs will deal with such significant events.

Rise of Sikh Fundamentalism

Rise of Sikh fundamentalism under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale (1947-1984) was a factor for sparking Hindu nationalism in India in 1980s. Sikhs are a privileged minority in India, having almost 15% representation in the Indian armed forces and with higher representation in Indian Civil Service than any other minorities (Yogendra and Dharendra, 1989, p. 319). Hindus and Sikhs maintained a close affinity for a long time and Hindus generally consider Sikhism as a sect of Hinduism. Despite this fact, the Akali Party launched a struggle for maintaining a distinct subnational Sikh identity in early 1980s under the leadership of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Akali Party wanted to implement

‘Anandpur Resolution’ which aimed to declare a semi-autonomous, federal region of Punjab as a homeland for Sikhs. As a result of Sikh militancy, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was gunned down by her own Sikh bodyguard in 1984 and consequently an anti-Sikh riot swept through India (Kumar, 2002, p. 18). Between 1980 and 1984, when the Sikh extremist movement was contained, it was Hindus who bore the brunt of Sikh militancy in the state. The trust and brotherhood what had existed between the Sikhs and Hindus suddenly shattered and Hindus remained shell-shocked by their bitter experience. It had a grave implication on rising Hindutva.

Article 370

From mid-1980s onward, the BJP had been continually arguing for the abrogation of Article 370 from the Indian constitution which became one of the major pre-election points of BJP. Article 35A of the Indian constitution had been added under article 370 through a Presidential Order in 1954 (Rai, 2019, p. 270). It gives Jammu & Kashmir Legislature complete power to define who the ‘permanent residents’ of the state are. Article 370 is a special constitutional provision that provides a measure of autonomy to the Muslim-majority state of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K). In fact, Article 370 guaranteed special status to J&K which was contrary to the system of federalism that the 1950 constitution sought to build. Due to quasi-autonomous political status of J&K, the Muslim majority had resorted to anti-Indian activities ever since which was evident through the expulsion of over one hundred thousand minority Hindus from the Kashmir valley (Mishra, 2000, pp. 4-5). Besides, many Muslims were involved in guerrilla activities to secede J&K from India. Many Hindus in rest of India were unhappy over this matter. BJP gained a strong support base by using this issue as many Indians were concerned about increasing influence of their arch-enemy Pakistan in Kashmir.

Shah Bano Case and Uniform Civil Code

After the assassination of Indira Gandhi, her son Rajiv Gandhi

came to power in 1984. Five years following the 1984 elections, the INC Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi took a number of policies that influenced Upper and Middle class Indians to take pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim stand. One of these is related to the Shah Bano Case. In April 1978, a 62-year-old Muslim woman, Shah Bano filed a petition in court demanding maintenance from her divorced husband Mohammed Ahmad Khan who was a lawyer by profession in Madhya Pradesh. The two were married in 1932 and had five children (*The Indian Express*, August 23, 2017). After 43 years of marriage Mohammed Ahmad Khan married for the second time in 1975 and separated from Shah Bano according to the Muslim Personal Law (*Shari'a*) and refused to provide her maintenance of Rs.200 which he had apparently promised. Shah Bano did not take it easily and she approached the court and sought maintenance under section 125 (Code of Criminal Procedure). She demanded Rs. 500 per month as maintenance. Subsequently her husband gave her an irrevocable triple *talaq* (divorce) on November 6, 1978 and used it as a defense to not pay maintenance (Verma, *ipleaders*, June 5, 2020). Various court judgments upheld the rights of Shah Bano to monthly allowance. Khan appealed to the Supreme Court in 1985 but Supreme Court rejected the appeal and pointed that Section 125 of the Criminal procedure applied to people of all religions and faiths living in India (Mishra, 2000, p. 6). After the verdict, Muslims went on serious rampage claiming the verdict a violation of their personal law. Under pressure of Muslim public opinion, Rajiv Gandhi government enacted a law in the parliament that overturned the Supreme Court judgment in the Shah Bano Case (Josh, 2018, p. 180). This move taken by government was resented by not only Hindu zealots but also secular minded Hindus and progressive Muslims. Rajiv Gandhi, then in power, followed a policy of appeasement towards Muslims out of fear that Muslim vote for INC would reduce (Battaglia, 2017, p.11). This had been seen by majority Hindus as the policy of appeasement towards Muslim orthodoxy and betrayal of the promise of implementation of Uniform Civil Code made in the Constitution. As such, INC was

accused of pandering pseudo-secularism – a pejorative term used to denote minority appeasement – by Hindu nationalists.

Broadcasting of Ramayana and Mahabharata on National Television

Ramayana was broadcasted from 1987 to 1988 and Mahabharata was broadcasted from 1988 to 1990 on national television (*Doordarshan*) in India. These were not only most popular serials ever seen in Indian Television but it had also great social implications (Snehi, 2003, p. 16). Many expounders connected this to the BJP's subsequent political success as these serials ignited the revival of affection for Hindu tradition and the very implicit message carried by the programs was that the Hindu mythology is the basis of Hindu culture (Battaglia, 2017, p.12). During and after the Ramayana and Mahabharata broadcast, the Sangh Parivar took it as a chance to capitalize on a Hindu awakening and build a Hindu consciousness. Thenceforth, this idea of 'Ram Rajya' (the golden era of Lord Rama) had been a buzzword for the Hindu nationalist groups like BJP and its associates. Thus, the sense of establishing 'Ram Rajya', partly triggered by Ramayana TV series, later provoked Hindu nationalists to orchestra a nationwide Ram Janmabhoomi movement. This movement ultimately catapulted the BJP to the national limelight in the 1990s.

Mandal Commission Report and OBCs

Mandal Commission report and Ratha Yatra both were interconnected. The Mandal Commission was formed in India on January 1, 1979. In 1980, the Commission submitted its report by recommending that members of other backward classes (OBCs) be granted reservations to 27% of jobs under the central government and public sector undertakings. The Report became the issue of sharp political controversy when the National Front government under V. P. Singh decided to implement this recommendation of the Report in August 1990. BJP, as a part of V. P. Singh government, perceived this as a threat to their ideology of Hindutva and organic

Hindu Society because they thought it would trigger the identity politics of the caste which was not aspired by BJP. This attempt at class mobilization was a direct threat to the efforts of the BJP (and the parivar generally) to construct a pan-Hindu identity (Andersen and Damle, 2019, p. 9). It was at this point that the BJP and the RSS came out in support of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and took a leading role in organizing Ram Rath Yatra. The BJP campaign manifesto of 1991 parliamentary election included was even entitled 'Towards Ram Rajya'. BJP leader L. K. Advani started his chariot journey from Somnath temple in 1990 and roused anti-Muslim sentiments throughout his journey and it culminated through the Babri mosque demolition in 1992.

Discontent over Indian Secularism and Influence of Neighboring States

Secularism means complete separation between state and religion where state will not practice any kind of interference in religious matters. The preamble of Indian constitution declares India as a secular country. The word secular had not been defined under the constitution in 1950 or in 1976 when it was made part of the preamble (Subhan, 2016, p. 9). Actually, Indian secularism does not mean a complete separation between state and religion; instead, state is equally indulgent of all religious groups as well as favored none. Nor did Indian secularism synonymous with French version of secularism or *laïcité*. French secularism (*laïcité*) keeps religion out of governmental institution whereas Indian secularism supports financial aids to religious schools and existence of 'personal law' for different religious communities (Tharoor, 2018). Jawaharlal Nehru outlined his views on Indian secularism by saying:

'We talk about a secular state in India. It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for 'secular'. Some people think it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honors all faith equally and gives them equal opportunities (Gopal, 1980, p. 330).'

Amartya Sen also argues that, Indian secularism emphasizes neutrality between different religions rather than prohibition of religious associations in state activities (Sen, 2005, p. 19). So, Indian secularism denotes equality of treatment of different faiths by the state rather than complete separation between state and religion.

But Indian Government subsequently allowed Muslims and Christians to follow their personal and family laws but undertook reform of the civil code affecting Hindus, in line with liberal principles. Hindu nationalists always charge it as pseudo-secularism (Harriss, John, Craig Jeffrey and Stuart Corbridge, 2017, p. 9). Following the independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru imposed a uniform civil law for Hindus but Muslims were allowed to follow their personal law. This had generated considerable anguish among the Hindus because Hindus perceived it against the norms and values of a secular democratic state (Mishra, 2000, p. 6). So, the nature and application of Indian secularism triggered pro-Hindu attitude by accusing it as a tool to appease Muslims which had been intense after the Shah Bano Case. In fact, between 1950s and 1970s, India's secular model seemed to work relatively well. But in 1980s India's secularism came under severe strain when INC started to pander one religious community. Additionally, steps taken by neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh also reignited Hindu nationalism in India. In neighboring Pakistan, Islam had been declared as a state religion while minority Hindus and Sikhs were driven out of Pakistan and constitutionally no non-Muslim can hold the top governmental post. At the time of the formation of Pakistan in 1947, about 23% of Pakistan's population was non-Muslim citizens. Today this figure has declined to about 3%. As per the last Population Census conducted in Pakistan in 2017, Hindu constitutes only 1.73% and Christian constitutes only 1.27% of Pakistan population where Muslims account for 96.47% of the population (Hoodboy, *Voice of America*, July 01, 2021). During the time of General Zia-ul-Haq, the 3rd military ruler of Pakistan (1977-88), a policy of state-led Islamization was imposed. Now Pakistan has the strictest blasphemy law among the Muslim majority countries which

has been exploited for persecuting religious minorities. Pakistan's infamous 'Blasphemy Law' is targeting religious minorities on a regular basis. Pakistan inherited the blasphemy law from its British colonial ruler but between 1980 and 1986 under the rule of General Zia-ul-Haq, these laws had been strengthened by adding a number of new clauses, all specific to Islam. Between 1986 and 2010, 1,274 people had been charged under this law, whereas this number was only 14 before 1986 (Ispahani, 2013, p. 64). Ever-decreasing Hindu minority is facing conversions and kidnappings, often for ransom. Eventually, a good number of Hindu families are migrating or seeking asylum in neighboring India. Moreover, Bangladesh got its identity as a separate independent state in 1971 and adopted a secular constitution in 1972. But as events evolved, the country underwent a process of Islamization. Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country where, according to the 2013 government census, Muslims constitute 89% of the population. Despite being a Muslim-majority country, Bangladesh used to practice a moderate version of Islam where orthodox norms were considerably absent. But moderate version of Islam began to shift significantly in the 1980s due to the growing influence of Wahhabism (Ganguly, *Foreign Policy*, October 29, 2021). After the coup of 1975, General Ziaur Rahman strengthened the religious basis of constitution by deleting 'Secularism', which was one of the four fundamentals of the constitution of 1972. Later on, on March 17, 1988, Islam became the official religion of Bangladesh by the 8th amendment of the constitution during the regime of General Ershad (Yogendra and Dharendra, 1989, p. 321). In last few decades, a number of radical Islamists groups flourished in Bangladesh such as, *Ansarullah Bangla Team*, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and *Jamaat-ul-Mujahidden*. These radical groups have emboldened their attacks on Hindu community. Hindu community has shrunk from 13.5% in 1974 (as per first population census of 1974) to 8.96% in 2011 (as per last population census of 2011) which indicates an anti-Hindu environment prevailing in this country. Dr. Abul Barkat, Professor of Economics at University of Dhaka, in his well-researched book *The Political Economy of Reforming Agriculture*:

Land Water Bodies in Bangladesh (2016) points out that “there will be no Hindus left within Bangladesh within 30 years...The rate of exodus over 49 years points to that direction”. According to his study, from 1964 to 2013, about 11.3 million Hindu left Bangladesh due to religious persecution and discrimination (Cited in Gumaste, *The Sunday Gurdian*, February 8, 2020). So, the religious persecution and discrimination on minorities in eastern and western neighbors had contributed Hindu nationalist in India to grow exponentially since 1980s.

So what we observe that for various political atmospheres Hindutva had become dominant in 1980s and especially in 1990s when India saw the decay of liberal secular politics and rise of BJP as a political party (Anand, 2011, p. 3). This Hindutva attitude rose to its peak in 1992 at the time of Babri mosque demolition. By grooming Hindutva successfully, BJP assumed the power at national level in the late 1990s. In 1996 for just thirteen days, then for thirteen months in 1998-1999 and for the 3rd time from 1999-2004 under the leadership of Vajpayee (The Rise of Hindu Fundamentalism: Implications for India and Global Mission. *Lausanne Global Analysis*, 2019). As such, India saw for the first time after independence, BJP as a political party in India which embodies Hindutva, formed a government in secular India. Each time from 1996 to 2004 BJP led a coalition government which after a decade of interval comes to power in 2014 with absolute parliamentary majority.

Conclusion

To conclude, the trend of the development of Hindutva in India in the twentieth century is not linear in nature as Hindutva is not a static or monolithic concept. The intellectual journey of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism started in the nineteenth century but it took its definite shape in the 1920s. V. D. Savarkar is famously named as the pioneer of this social change. He established Hindutva as a concrete political ideology. Up until 1947, the desire of Hindutva movement had been represented by RSS and Hindu Mahasabha and at the same time those forces were only against the policy of

appeasement towards Muslims and the partition of India. Hindutva movement, during this stage, was not about achieving political power (Sharma, 2002, pp. 23-24). But after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 and with the formation of BJS in 1951, Hindutva underwent an ideological paradigm shifting by starting to identify India with Hindutva. And, since then Hindu nationalism has been developed alongside street mobilizations and explicit political projects. But after the imposition of Emergency by Indira Gandhi government in 1975 and with merging its identity in the coalition Janata Party; Hindutva forces once again went culturally, like the pre-independence era. But it is the 1980s when Hindutva started to achieve its popularity in India for various reasons. Since 1980s INC began to lose its ground in Indian politics as its concepts of secularism and nationalism started to fade away gradually while Hindu nationalism seized its opportunity to rise again. In fact, in the first half of 1980s BJP under the leadership of Vajpayee took a moderate approach by emphasizing on Gandhian socialism and Upadhyaya's doctrine of Integral Humanism rather than the communal issues which ultimately resented RSS and Sangh Parivar and as a result it did very poorly in 1984 elections by achieving only 2 seats. Eventually, BJP took a turn toward an explicit communal strategy from 1986 onward after L. K. Advani's election as party president which rose to its peak in 1992 during the Babri mosque demolition. Hindutva, if truth be told, became the mainstream in the 1990s irrespective of the party in the power. As such, by grooming Hindutva successfully from the mid-1980s and in the 1990s BJP assumed power at national level in 1996. Accordingly, for the first time after independence, secular India saw the coming of a Hindu nationalist party in political power at national level.

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